

# Build it *and they will come*

It may be a line from a movie, but in true life-imitating-art style, there's a bit of Hollywood happening in Wairoa. Tourists and travellers descend on the town following the completion of a world-class mountain bike park.

WORDS & PHOTOS Tim Warrington





**B**reathtaking' is a word which often makes editors bristle with rage. Too clichéd, they cry. But standing at the top of Wairoa Mountain Bike Park, I knew it was the only fitting adjective.

I had just hiked two kilometres uphill carrying eight kilograms of camera equipment, and the climb had stolen my puff, so technically it truly was breathtaking.

Anyway, the park is so amazing it's near impossible not to slip in a sneaky cliché. This is the sort of place that screams for superlatives and it really is spectacular. I mean, where else can you bike and see rockets launch?

**The view from the top, looking towards Mahia Peninsula and the Rocket Lab launch facility, is absolutely stunning.**

Multisport association Adventure Wairoa president, Russell McCracken, says it's 'awesome'. It's that too.

It's also notching up lots of praise from visitors and sporting administrators.

The park has already played host to significant sporting meets, including the Tairāwhiti Secondary Schools Mountain Bike Challenge in September last year – a cross-country event mixing uphill and downhill riding to test the abilities and stamina of the cyclists.

Since the world-class park opened to the public last April, bikers and their bikes have come to ride and race between the pine trees.

The track, on the outskirts of this northern Hawke's Bay town, rapidly took shape under the tree canopy and has already welcomed thousands of riders.





McCracken expects visitor numbers to continue climbing and the park to become a regular fixture on sporting calendars, developing into a staple attraction for local families, professional riders and tourists.

McCracken says the park was seen as a great way to get more people out cycling, specifically mountain biking, as well as enhancing what is on offer in the local community. “We wanted to encourage community participation in adventure sports by using the natural resources of the Wairoa District.”

Rotorua-based track designers and builders Southstar Adventures broke ground in June 2016 after Adventure Wairoa had the vision of a purpose-built mountain bike park for the Wairoa community.

**The result is almost eight kilometres of trail with five bridges. The track is loosely based on Rotorua’s Whakarewarewa Redwoods Mountain Bike Park, with Wairoa having the option of adding more grade four and five trails at a later date.**

McCracken says, “I can’t overstate just how big this is for Wairoa. Mountain biking is huge in New Zealand, and having this sort of facility a stone’s throw from the town centre is great for the community.”

Adventure Wairoa worked closely with Wairoa District Council and McCracken said it was fantastic to have their support on this project.

Thanks to a grant from the First Light Community Foundation, the first stages of the track were completed quickly. Further funding from Eastern and Central Community Trust (ECCT) and New Zealand Lotteries made plans and blueprints a reality, and the park was finished on time and on budget.

**“So much work has gone into creating this community asset — hours of negotiation, design, paperwork and creative planning,” McCracken says.**

The park was first opened to Adventure Wairoa members, and later extended to the public once it had been tested and signage was put in place. “The potential for the track is almost limitless,” he says.

“It’s likely to become a must-do destination for avid bikers and a boon for the district, benefitting local businesses, including hospitality and accommodation.

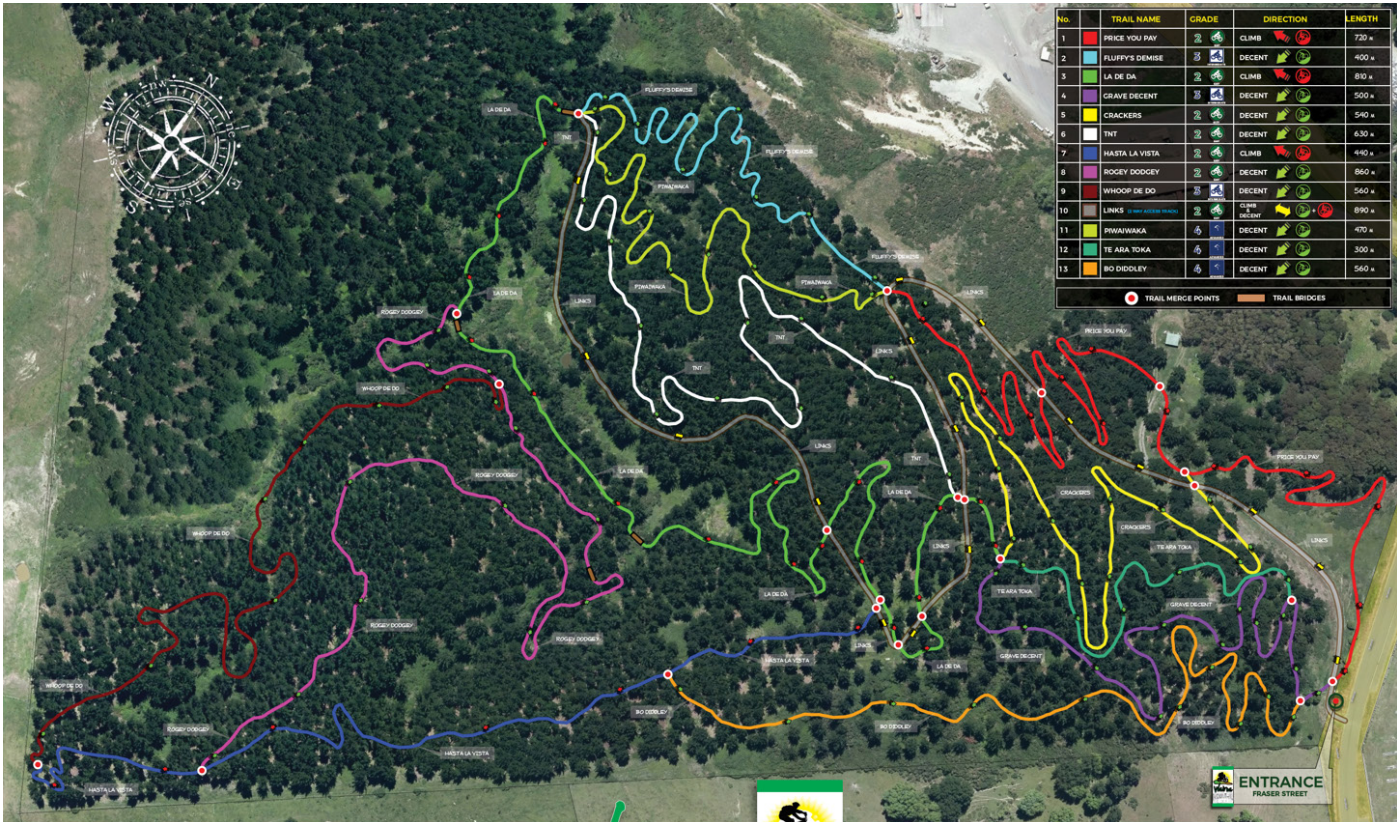
“There are also possibilities for further development at the site as tourists and visitor numbers grow.”

Several schools are only a couple of kilometres from the track, and there is great potential for students to take advantage of the facility.

On its completion, the entire 26-hectare site on the southern edge of Wairoa township was gifted to the community by Wairoa District Council.









# WAIROA

## Mountain Bike Park

### get the lowdown

#### BIKE TRACK DESIGN

One of New Zealand's top bike track designers says Wairoa's mountain bike park is a big win for the local community. Jeff Carter, director and trail designer for Southstar Trails in Rotorua, has designed tracks all over the world. He says Wairoa's Fraser Street site is ideal, largely due to local topography and also because of the tree canopy.

"The trees at the site are about fifteen years old, which provides great shelter from the sun and stops ground cover and foliage growing too high," he says. "The track was particularly easy to mark out because I wasn't knee-deep in weeds." According to Carter, Wairoa's track stands out in other ways, not least because of its proximity to the town centre.

"It's unusual to have a track within the town limits and means you don't need to travel far to get there. This makes it convenient for locals and visitors, and perfect for children who want to ride to the park on their bikes," he says.

"Another bonus of being close is that you don't have the added expense of building costly infrastructure like carparks."

Carter, a mechanical engineer, said the idea is to maximise the downhill runs from the uphill climbs: "You want three or four downhills for each uphill."

Southstar Trails has achieved success with tracks across New Zealand, including Waitangi Mountain Bike Park in the Bay of Islands, the Arepa Trail in Rotorua and the Napier Concrete Pump track.

Carter says the new bike track is another feather in the cap for Wairoa tourism.

"Wairoa has a massive summer explosion in tourist numbers, but mountain biking is not just a summer sport. The new track has the potential to extend the shoulder tourism season for the Wairoa district."

#### THE TRACK – 8KM

- There is 4.9 km of Grade 2 trail. This is considered by enthusiasts as 'easy' and is mostly flat, with some gentle climbs on smooth track and a few easily avoidable obstacles such as rocks and potholes.
- There's just under 1.5 km of Grade 3 or intermediate track. This is made up of steep slopes and avoidable obstacles, possibly on narrow track and occasional poor traction. There may be exposure at the track's outside edge.
- The most challenging section is 1.3 km of Grade 4 or advanced track – a mixture of long, steep climbs, narrow track, poor traction and obstacles that are difficult to avoid or jump over. With this section being generally exposed at the track's outside edge, most riders will find some parts easier to walk.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

- The Mountain Bike Park is located on Fraser Street, Wairoa.
- The park is free and open during daylight hours, seven days a week. (But check the website in wet weather) .
- Family, group and individual memberships are available for Adventure Wairoa, and include waka ama, rowing, cycling, mountain biking and SUP boarding.
- Children need to be eight years and over to ride the park.
- For more information you can find Adventure Wairoa on Facebook or visit [www.sporty.co.nz/adventurewairoa](http://www.sporty.co.nz/adventurewairoa)